

Tariq D. O'Meally: A Community Healer & Architect of Opportunity

This piece is part of a series about BlackLight Summit, written by Ashayla Byrd, a BlackLight Summit Emerging Artist.

His eyes search the air, waiting for the thoughts swirling in his mind to materialize into spoken word. His feet tap irregularly, punctuating each sentence, one sentence bumping into the next. Tariq D. O'Meally, one of the founding architects of the BlackLight Summit, is an agile thinker to say the least. For those of you that follow the stars, Tariq is a Scorpio Sun, Moon, Mercury and Pluto; let that sink in. It's giving intensity, deep introspection, methodical thinking, and passion. In conversation, one can see him processing thirty trajectories for a single exchange in real time.

Rightfully so. He always had an affinity for the otherworldly, the intangible: "How did I come into being? I'm a nerd with a large enthusiasm for film, so because I struggled with making friends, I kind of would disappear or self-actualize in watching lots of different films." A DMV native raised by a House-dancing mother, O'Meally's world continuously moved. Although he was surrounded by dance, his personal entry into the field began much later. The beginning of Tariq's dance journey was accompanied by the start of a more than decade-long grieving process due to the death of his childhood friend at 18 years old. Leaping headlong into dance offered the comfort and support he needed, but this was only the beginning for him; he found a conduit for the expression of his grief and all its friends.

Rippling his way through Anne Arundel Community College's Dance Company, the American College Dance Association's annual festival, the American Dance Festival, and the dance department of Virginia Commonwealth University, Tariq absorbed dance as often and as fully as he could. This, in combination with his upbringing, has greatly informed Tariq's ethos, both personally and artistically: "Child-rearing from my mother was about being self-sufficient and accountable...not being a liar...So much of my work, from that end, I draw from my mother; it's about telling the truth as I see it or may experience it." O'Meally mentions being socialized by Black women, figures in his life who served as "social workers." Through these women, Tariq learned the value of showing up, fully and consistently, for others. They taught him how crucial it is to provide for, take care of, and protect his community. He continues to remain accountable to himself and others while extending care with an earnest intentionality.

Tariq is a walking BrainyQuote.com, so naturally he cites Anne Reinking in stating that "our job as artists, as dancers, is to pass it on." In walks the opportunity to create the BlackLight Summit alongside two formidable DMV dance pillars: the deeply wise Ronya-Lee Anderson and the ever-intuitive Sarah Beth Oppenheim. He recalls that "BlackLight is born out of working to make space for my friends, my colleagues, people...and by people, I mean artists...I'm always clear about what is missing." To Tariq, building the BlackLight Summit alongside Ronya-Lee and Sarah Beth is about bridging the community and creating a courageous environment for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ folks to interface with and pour into one another.

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At COVID's height and in BlackLight's first iteration, conversations about legacy, connection and collective triumph were paramount. The second summit interrogated power's relationship with those driven by passion. In its third year, the BlackLight Summit now challenges its community to embrace risk and regeneration, to develop new tools for new awareness. This year's summit will include panels, Chat & Chews, movement workshops, and a stunning line-up of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ artists.

Tariq's ultimate hope for BlackLight is that it can show its community how to hold one another's dreams. To build a "gentle army in the village." He asks, "How do we practice wellness? How do we share body heat? How do we express our rage? How do we take risks together? How do we, you know, hit rock bottom together so we can climb out together?"

How can we heal together?

Ashayla Byrd (she/they) is a DC-based dance artist and writer who is dedicated to amplifying the voices of BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ folks. Originally from Virginia Beach, Ashayla is eager to explore the richness of DC's dance and writing communities!